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POEMS

BY

BEATRICE MAYOR

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POEMS



POEMS

BY

BEATRICE MAYOR



LONDON : GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.
RUSKIN HOUSE, 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C. 1

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A FEBRUARY DAWN

It is early that I am awake.
The curtains are still drawn.
The streets are quiet
Ah! I know why I am awake.
Delicious sounds.
Forgotten sounds.
It is they have lifted me from sleep.
Delicious sounds.

It is most wonderful this.
The ceiling has some light.
One wall is streaked.
Oh, wonderful to lie like this,
And hear them singing,
Singing, singing,
Outside where no one walks,
The birds singing.

And it was the winter last night.
And only last night my heart
Lay dark and dry.
Yes, my heart was in winter last night.
Now it weeps with shame,
It weeps with joy,
It weeps as it listens and believes,
With shame, with joy.

DUST

WHEN I see dust
Dancing in a ray,
Still am I astonished,
And held from word,
Gazing as then I gazed long years away,
And with no harder thought,
No fathoming come to me from the hand of time,
But gazing as then I gazed,
Rapt, astonished,
Only to see dust
Dancing in a ray.

EVENING

I STAND in the grey field.
The night-birds trill.
Around are great grey cows,
Still, very still.
And the trees are still and the grasses still
And I.

I stand in the grey field.
The light skies change.
Around are great dim cows,
Strange, very strange.
And the trees are strange and the grasses strange
And I.

I stand in the grey field.
The night tide rolls.
Around I can see cows—
Nay, they are souls.
And the trees are souls and the grasses souls
And I.

AN AUTUMN DUSK

LEAVES are running on the lawn.
Grey hurrying clouds slip over the skies.
The birds all have vanished.
A window lightens.

Listen! there are voices in the house.
I do not know what words they are saying.
And now there is laughter—
And again laughter.

Leaves running on the lawn!
Clouds! Huddled invisible birds!
And you strange laughter!
Where are you going?
Together you are going
Though you do not know it.
Living world,
Where are you going?

PANIC

LITTLE bright things of life,
Where are you ?
Come back to me through the mist.
Come back, and I will not lose you again,
Little bright things of life.

Oh, I have mused too deep,
I am frightened.
I have strayed at the back of thought.
I have seen, and now I cannot see you,
Little bright things of life.

O, shine out of the mist.
Where are you ?
I know now that I am yours.
I know it, and I will not leave you again,
Little bright things of life.

THE GRASS

I LIKE the grass.

It listens.

It is kind.

Above all it is calm.

I can say to it all wildnesses,

It will not stir, look up surprised, as friends do.

It listens,

Listens,

Then silently,

Gathers my frenzy to its great green peace,

And I arise.

MORNING

I SEE fields, on and on fields,
Green and grey and earth-brown fields
Lying in pale sun.

I touch the breeze, the invisible breeze,
The small swift excited breeze
That runs in the pale sun.

I see clouds. I see rooks,
A hundred sailing swinging rooks
High in the pale sun.

And my soul leaps free.

Tired soul. Stifled soul.
It thought that it lived in a world of men,
That it only was known in a world of men,
Only judged in a world of men.
Tired soul. Stifled soul.

But now it leaps free.

It has seen that it lives in the pale sun,
With the cloud and the rook in the pale sun.
Silent above the world of men,
O merciful pale sun.

AT A WINDOW

THREE fir trees in a field,
Dark, tall, twisted at their tops.
I saw them without thinking,
I saw them from my window,
And they saw me.

They stared at me and stared.
Dark, tall, wind-torn at their tops.
They told me they were brothers,
They said I was their brother
In one wide field.

A NEW THOUGHT

THE hour when a new thought speaks,
What wonder is in that hour,
What release is in that hour.

If it should steal upon us in our pain
How we smile,
How it seems no longer ours, our pain,
Only the world's.

If it should rise upon our bliss,
O joy of joys,
We are no longer slaves of bliss,
Yet bliss is ours.

That hour when a new thought speaks,
Wonder is in that hour,
Release is in that hour.

EVENING OVER THE FOREST

WATCH.

What is it you see ?

The stark bough of an oak.
Beyond it the evening sky.
Clear, clear the evening sky
And green like a green pearl.

Did you hear ?
What did you hear ?

The harsh cry of a bird.
Beyond it the evening sky.
Still, still the evening sky
And green like a green pearl.

Oh, search.
What is it you see ?

Fiery snowy little clouds
Sailing to sleep in the sky.
Dim, dim the evening sky
Like a deep green pearl.

Come away.
Come away.

DEATH

LITTLE bird
Crouched in my hand,
Not seeking to escape,

Little bird
That I set down,
And that stays,
With hunched throbbing breast,

Little
 lonely
 dying
 bird,
What thought is yours ?
In the dark shrub
To-night,
No one will know
The deep tale of your death.

WAYFARERS

THERE are white clouds above.
There is sunshine,
There is still, deep blue sunshine,
And somewhere
A singing lark.
And the long road is empty.
I watch,
And I wonder who will pass.

There are lit hills around.
There are shadows,
There are giant dim cloud shadows,
And close by
Two butterflies.
On the long road there is some one.
I watch,
And I wonder who will pass.

White clouds are above us,
Sunshine,
Warm, deep blue sunshine,
And somewhere
That singing lark.
With no word or gesture
We glance,
And we tell who we are.

Gone,
Swift gone,
For ever gone,
Like the cloud shadows that were round us.

The long road is empty.
I watch.
And I wonder who will pass.

HURRYING HOME

HURRYING home
Through the dark wakeful town,
Upon a windy night,
November,
Turning into a solitary street,
Tired,
Thoughtless,
Utterly indifferent to all things and myself,
I saw suddenly the sky.

Stars.
The air,
Black seething to itself, the air.
Unseen cloud.
But stars,
High, high, incredible,
Deep in themselves, stars.

Upon a windy night,
November.
I stood still in that solitary street,
Baffled,
Breathless,
The savage insistency of all things and myself
Piercing me so that I wept.

THE SHELL

I FOUND a shell.

'Twas one of those shy marvels sea-depths lave.
And there it lay, until I picked it from the sand,
Singing, I thought.

I listened well,
As there I stood beside the quiet wave.
It only shone, and smiled up mocking from my hand,
And uttered nought.

That little shell
Has left a strange white glimmer in life's cave.
It could not yield, to one who could not understand,
Its singing thought.

I know not well,
But see each man close muffled and a slave.
Without are worlds, bright rolling as the summer sand,
And all unsought.

I cannot tell,
But see one day men stepping from this cave,
And in their ears is music that from where we stand
Is all uncaught.

I found a shell.

'Twas one of those shy marvels sea-depths lave.
And there it lay, until I touched it with my hand,
Singing, I thought.

CONVALESCENCE

I AM tired.
I have lain here
Hours
Trying to think what life is.
Now I am tired.
I cannot think.
And I have not found what life is.
So I must lie here and look at chaos,
And let it bounce and shriek against my brain,
And be resigned,
As ever be resigned.

So I lie.
In the room here
Shadows
Tell me that it is evening.
A long sunbeam
Has struck the floor,
A last from the cool evening.
I will lie here and watch that sunbeam.
It pleases me, it comforts me, it says :
“ What does truth matter ?
“ Whatever does truth matter ? ”

A DAY IN THE COUNTRY

HERE in the quiet lane
Where each quiet leaf
Gazes silent at the passing sun and cloud
And is entranced,
Here in the quiet June lane,
How terrible and frenzied seems the street.

Oh, in this still lane,
Where one happy bird,
High on a twig,
Throws its song up to the passing sun and cloud,
And then is mute,
Oh, in this still green lane,
How terrible, how frenzied seems the street !

IN A RAILWAY WAITING-ROOM

A YOUNG woman, ragged, pale, and with wide sorrowful eyes,

A youth, muffled, silent, and with strained seeking eyes,

An old woman, coughing and cold and crouching,

A man, sullen and unaware,

And my mute self, we are gathered.

Without are winds, wild, and a loud hissing rain.

In the still warmth we are gathered.

Our eyes are on the red flame. . . .

The hour glides. . . .

We are mute, we watch the red flame.

To the red flame we tell our tale, we speak our need,
we give the precious world of what we are.

Cautious we give it to the red flame.

And the hour glides.

And the hour glides.

And suddenly the hour groans :

“Men ! Women ! I gathered you.

“From far parts, from far deeds, I gathered you.

“Each with the precious world of what you are,

“Each with the precious thirst for that which
others are.

“Men, women, sullen and unaware ! I gave you
myself. I waited.”

And the hour dies.

CULTURE AND SQUALOR

In the lit window above
While the night passes
Figures lean.
And they pour words about life,
And they pour words about love.
And the night passes.
Figures lean.
And their mouths move and move.

In the dark drizzle below
While the night passes
Figures lean.
There are no words about life,
There are no words about woe.
And the night passes.
Figures lean.
And their souls know, they know.

LAUGHTER

I LEAP into life's show.
Around me laughter breaks.
I live. I laugh. And oh,
I think my soul awakes.

One night, as soft as snow,
I hear a woman weep. . . .
I live. I laugh. But oh,
I know my soul's asleep.

WHEN I LOOK OUT

WHEN I look out
It is not fields I see,
Nor is it hill,
Nor garden,
Nor gracious sky of cloud and peeping blue,
When I look out
I see a wall,
I watch
Sunshine playing with poor weeds upon that wall.
And I am filled
Swiftly,
Miraculously,
With the great careless beauty that is earth's.

ON THE WAY

I MET a Wonder on the way,
Singing.

We stood a while.

We spoke a while.

And then it said :

“ I am a Wonder, and I cannot stay.”

And so it fled.

I stood a while.

I wept a while.

And then I strode upon my way,
Singing.

LIFE

SOMETIMES

When I look at Life
I see her eyes
Tired and full of tears.
I see the dark thing Death.
I am afraid.
Tears.
I dare not leave tears.

Sometimes

When I look at Life
I see her eyes
Shining and full of joy.
I see the dark thing Death
All unafraid.
Joy.
I laugh to leave joy.

A WINTER AFTERNOON

FROM the sky suddenly
A red light on a roof.

And the sky grey,
So wintry, so oppressed,
I thought surely a snowing twilight near.

How have you come,
Red light ?
Like a strange bird
From the sky suddenly—
Does anyone see you
Besides me ?—
Settling upon a bleak roof. . . .
And now flown.

Red light,
I am glad I espied you,
I among the thousands unaware.

Night comes.
Nothing is on earth like you again.

FIRST MORNING AT THE SEA

I WAKE.

I gaze.

It is the sky.

It is the sea.

And there is the pale quiet sand.

It is the world.

I see my life, I see myself a little busy mouse that
runs in a high cathedral.

Sky.

Sea.

Pale quiet sand.

World.

Suddenly the little mouse looks up.

SPRING 1917

It is spring.
The buds break softly, silently.
This evening
The air is pink with the low sun,
And birds sing.

Do we believe
Men are now killing, dying—
This evening,
While the sky is pink with the low sun,
And birds sing ?

No. . . .
So they go on killing, dying,
This evening,
And through summer, autumn, winter,
And through spring.

A HALT

SILENCE.

And a sudden stillness.

The train, swift running in the night,

Has slowed,

Has stopped.

We wondering look out.

Darkness.

Walls, lighted windows.

Faces that look up from their work,

That speak,

That sigh,

That wondering look out.

Souls that look out from their lives,

Hungry,

Dazed,

Alone each,

In the night.

Lighted souls, we and they, that know nothing,

One moment that gaze out at each other across the
night.

THE EDGE OF A WOOD

A THRUSH is singing.
I stand and hear it.
I see blue flowers
Growing in the grass,
Stilly growing
Thousands in the grass.
The thrush is silent.
I hear the high up larch tops sway.
O world !

And there are people
Who live in cities,
Who have not seen
Blue flowers in the grass,
Stilly growing
Thousands in the grass,
Nor stood and listened
To hear the high up larch tops sway.
O world !

BY THE FIRE

I SEE nothing,
Only the flames,
The little friendly flames.
They delight me spitting their little tongues up all
they can.

I hear nothing,
Only the flames,
The little talkative flames.
What story is that they are telling so quick as they
can ?

O flames,
 gay,
 intimate,
 free little flames,
To-night
At this hour,
What thousands of haggard slaves does your music
unchain.

THE STREET

It is noon.

I look down upon the street

From a high window.

Wonder fills me at what I see.

I know no words for what I see.

The people stream, a seller stands, boys are shouting,
cars dart, waggons roll,

But oh, I know no words.

Only I know thought lifts from me like a fog,

And my soul is torn yet glad at what I see.

THE EAGLE

I SAW an eagle in the sky.
Slowly and with the sun upon its breast
It sailed.

“Where, eagle, are you going?
“You do not turn,” I cried.
“You know where you are going.”

I wished I were that eagle,
And sailed,
And knew where I was going.

THE WIND

THE wind is walking in the tall firs.
Their tops shudder. Listen. Be still.
The long grey grass in the field stirs.
It leans and speaks with a low trill.
What is it saying to the earth?
And listen, oh listen to the sky,
Ragged and all muttering with some wild mirth.
Swiftest, and aloof from the others,
Two pale embraced clouds, what do they say?
They are chanting, chanting. . . . The chant smothers.
Soul, we hear nothing. Come away.
We know nothing, nothing, only that a wind walks
by.

A DREAM

THE mountains are like ghosts
Upon the distant strand.
And the pale seas are bare.
And on the rocks are hosts
Of cormorants that stand,
Dark cormorants that stare.
Quiet I lie

Beneath the sky. . . .
Afar, I sight
A steed, surf white,
Careering free,
Coming to me,
Till close he stands
Upon the sands.

Silent I mount this steed.
Across the still sea plain
With magic hoof we spring.
We gallop without heed.
We gallop without rein.
And as I ride I sing. . . .

Quiet I lie
Beneath the sky,
And seek in vain
The strange refrain
I sang in dream.
I thought its theme
Was like a knife
Clear stripping life.

RAIN

Soul that will not speak,
When a night black and blowing and full of rain
speaks,
Listen,
The voice is yours,
Soul that will not speak.

THE VISION

HEAR me, winds ! For we ride abreast
On the beating wings of the world's unrest !
Whisper, why do ye travel these downs,
Surging out of yon redded west,
Streaming east, where twilight frowns ?

Ye who are driven, ye who flow,
—Like a soul when the winds of passion blow—
Whisper, what is it drives ? What draws ?
Whisper the word we none of us know !
Where shall we slumber ? When shall we pause ?

Hear me, winds ! We are riders abreast
On the beating wings of the world's unrest !

“ Nightward over the downs we ride.

“ We have dreamed a dream

“ How sweet it were,

“ With the dawn a gleam

“ On the forest's hair,

“ Into its listening heart to glide.

“ Over the hills we leap and fall,

“ To meet the morn,

“ Where, breeze-unshaken,

“ Still and lorn

“ As a harp forsaken,

“ The forest awaits our wakening call.

“ Yet, so soon as our songs resound,

“ So soon as we think desire drowned,

“ Lo ! ’twill come—a thirst for the brine,
“ A passion to trail sweet scents from the vine,
“ To race with an eagle over soft snows,
“ Or to murmur our way to the heart of a rose.

“ But where shall we slumber ? Even as thou,
“ Brother, we dream.

“ A vision hails !

“ After we stream—

“ And the vision pales.

“ Valley to valley, hill-brow to brow,

“ Dives the glory, beckons the dream.

“ Even as thou,

“ Questioners ever,

“ Hill-brow to brow,

“ Pausing never,

“ After it over the world we stream.”

THE ANSWER

Go not with Hope. She is a child
Dances from hill to hill ;
Thou, a lame dweller of the vale,
Where there are fields to till.

To-day she calls to thee : “ O come !
“ See how ’tis sweet to climb ! ”
To-morrow thou shalt know the scorn,
Cruel, of lips sublime.

Go not with Hope. She is a gull
Challenges storm and sea ;
Thou, a frail linnet on the shore ;
She is no mate for thee.

She is a moon, silver and stark,
Laughs in the face of night.
Traveller, beware ! When she is gone,
The stars shall mock thy sight.

She is a bird, with soul ablaze,
Alights in a still wood ;
Startles unknowing solitudes,—
And leaves them understood.

To-day she is one shower of song.
To-morrow all is drear,
Only the rustle of earth’s leaves,
Thou and thy thirsting ear.

* * * * *

“ Child, on the hill tops, fire-eyed,
“ Spring on! I come! I climb!
“ The lame have souls. Shall they not dare,
“ Once in the whole of time?

“ Call on! I go with thee, swift gull!
“ I challenge wind and wave!
“ Beside thy glowing glancing wing,
“ What storm but I could brave?

“ Laugh out across the night, O moon!
“ With magic staff I stride,
“ If I once gaze upon life's plain,
“ Lit up, laughing and wide.

“ And thou, bird, with the soul ablaze,
“ Thou sweetest bird, sing out!
“ Sing! For who knows what echoes sleep,
“ Strangled in woods of doubt?

“ Sing! For who knows but destiny
“ Answers as she has heard?
“ Sing! Lest she wait in vain, and take
“ Thy silence as God's word.”

THE MOON

UNDER the stars' shower
Dark slept the wood,
When a large white moon floated into the night.
The traveller stood.

Out in the still field
Every grass
Craned up a sudden wonder-white neck,
To watch her pass.

From the fringe of a stark pine
Slowly she bared.
And the flooded hills woke in a dazzle, and black
The hedgerows stared.

Then, till each star drowned,
Into heaven's sea,
High over tree-tops sailed she and sailed,
Radiant, free.

The traveller stood tranced.
His spirit cried :
" Fools ! that we fret and toss in the world.
" Thus should life ride."

She smiled,—and she rode on,
Radiant, free.
He shuddered deep into the wood. She a moon,
A mortal was he.

IN A GARDEN

It is late.
There is no sound,
Only the leaves that fall.

The air is cold.
White mists
Walk ghostly upon the lawn.

Oh silence,
Are you listening?
I am speaking, speaking.

Oh silence,
You hear nothing,
Only the leaves that fall.

THE TRAMP

It is evening.

It rains.

All the people are in the houses.

Down the dark silent street

He treads on.

The rain flicks him.

It never ceases.

Near the windows he can see it,

And all the people by their fires.

He treads on.

Now he listens.

It's a song.

Voices are singing by the fire.

Through the rain that never ceases

He treads on.

Now beyond him

There is nothing—

Only darkness and the downs.

Sing, you people in your houses !

He treads on.

OCTOBER

To walk out upon the lawn,
To breathe the great radiant air,
To listen to the wind shaking the beeches,
And to see it run and scatter the lying leaves,
These things are mine,
They are here,
They cannot be withheld from me by any care or
 creed.
Oh, I had forgotten.
I thank them.
I walk out upon the lawn.

TWILIGHT ON THE CLIFFS

THE dark downs, how they stare.
And how the seas grow loud.
Above, oh I hear the hoofs
Of galloping, galloping cloud.
I am alone.

Listen ! What weird tune
Is beating upon the shore ?
Above, oh I hear the rush
Of words that mutter and roar.
I hurry on.

Listen ! What do they say,
Those dark dishevelled waves ?
It is something my heart fears.
It is something my heart craves.
Oh hasten.

Now they are lashing tongues :
“ Hear us ! We know ! We tell ! ”
The galloping winds cry loud :
“ We know ! We speak ! We spell ! ” . . .

* * * * *

I peer up from the dews.
I listen. I hear the waves.
But the thing that my heart fears,
The thing that my heart craves—
Did I dream ?

ON THE SHORE

THIS is the dark golden hour.
I, on the wet shore,
The wild shore,
Dream of some secret, in its bower
Behind the night's unlatched door.

Passes a little bare-foot child,
With blown hair,
And eyes mild,
Chanting to the cool air.

Dim grows the sea's swaying floor.
This is the gray hour,
The still hour.
When the whole earth is sleeping sure,
I think 'twill stir, that strange bower.

Passes a little running child,
With clutched hair,
And cries wild.
He has seen—while I stare.

IN A ROOM

Is it late ?

There is a dimness in the room around.

I think the hour chimed.

I do not know

I sit in the lamplight of my brain,

I do not heed.

Is it night ?

There is a coldness in the room around.

Ah ! the hour chimed.

I do not stir.

Crouched in red firelight of my brain,

Nothing, nothing in the whole world I heed.

EVENING IN A LONDON GARDEN

THE air is quiet.
Little green leaves
Lift goldened into the sun.
A few bird notes
Fall from the trees.
A high cloud sails.

The air is quiet.
Yet always I hear
The low great hum of the town.
Its shrill voices
Cry out and are gone.
Its stirred smoke climbs.

So evening comes.
And I, as I watch,
I know not is it joy,
Or what strange pain
Fills all my being,
While that high cloud sails.

THE PILGRIM

SOUL, you are a pilgrim.

Because you are a pilgrim you were born.

Because you are a pilgrim you will die.

To joy,

To sorrow,

To all that you may meet upon your way,

Cry :

“ I am a pilgrim. Let me go.”

And pass on.

A DAY OLD

WHEN they lay it by me
And bid me look,
I see an infant,
A small human thing they say is mine.
And I could weep,
So frail it is and blind and full of need.

When they leave it by me
And let me gaze,
I see—I know not—
A little warm creature in a wood, curled silent in the
leaves, with bright watching eyes.
And I am awed,
So strange it is and tense and by itself.

SOMETIMES

SOMETIMES

After a long day of rain,
When the skies are still all cloud
Though no rain falls,
Sometimes there comes,
There breaks peaceful from some unseen rent in the
 grey,
A light,
A clear broad light.
The soaked fields look up and shine.
Birds twitter.
Cows graze.
The yellow evening throbs,
It is overcome,
It is happier than any dawn.

Sometimes.

So light will steal into a heart,
It divines not whence,
Peaceful, overwhelming,
After a long hour of pain.

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